

Date: 25 June 2021

Subject: GM Minimum Licensing Standards for Taxi and Private Hire

Report of: Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester and Portfolio Lead for Transport; and
Sara Todd, Chief Executive of Trafford Council and GM Lead on Minimum Licensing Standards for Taxi and Private Hire

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To set out the progress that has been made on the development of a set of minimum licensing standards relating to taxi and private hire in Greater Manchester and outline the timetable for consideration.

GMCA RECOMMENDATIONS:

The GMCA is requested to:

1. Note the progress of the Minimum Licensing Standards workstream and endorse the proposed approach and timeline
2. Note the proposal to consider the final Standards recommendations in two stages; Stage 1 (Drivers, Operators and Local Authority) and Stage 2 (Vehicles)

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Equalities Implications: A draft EQIA was produced alongside the consultation and a final version will be published once recommendations are ready for being considered at district level.

Climate Change Impact Assessment and Mitigation Measures: The minimum licensing standards includes policy standards and a path to a fully zero emission capable taxi and private hire vehicle fleet by 2029, which will have a positive impact on carbon.

Risk Management: n/a

Legal Considerations: No legal considerations for GMCA. Legal considerations rest with local authorities.

Financial Consequences – Revenue: Each of the ten Licensing Authorities have agreed to contribute £5000 towards the development of Minimum Licensing Standards

Financial Consequences – Capital: n/a

Number of attachments to the report: None

Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee: n/a

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- 31 July 2020, report to GMCA: MLS Consultation
- 29 May 2020, report to GMCA: Clean Air Plan Update

TRACKING/PROCESS		
Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution		No
EXEMPTION FROM CALL IN		
Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency?		n/a
GM Transport Committee	Overview & Scrutiny Committee	
n/a	n/a	

1 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In 2018, Greater Manchester's ten local authorities agreed to collectively develop, approve and implement a common set of minimum licensing standards (MLS) for taxi and private hire services.
- 1.2 At that time, the primary driver for this work was to ensure public safety and protection, but vehicle age and emission standards in the context of the Clean Air and the decarbonisation agendas are now also major considerations. In addition, by establishing standards around common livery and colour, MLS is an important mechanism that permits the systematic improvements to taxi and private hire service across Greater Manchester and their visibility.
- 1.3 This approach stands to benefit drivers and the trade more widely as public confidence in a well-regulated and locally licensed taxi and private hire services grows and will contribute directly to better air quality and lower carbon emissions. By establishing and implementing Greater Manchester-wide minimum licensing standards, we can help to ensure that all residents and visitors see these services as safe and reliable, and preferable to those not licensed by Greater Manchester local authorities.
- 1.4 Ultimately the collaborative approach that the MLS represents will help achieve the vision of a strong, professional and healthy taxi and private hire sector providing safe and high quality services to residents and visitors across the whole of Greater Manchester. This vision sees Taxis and Private Hire as a crucial part of the overall transport offer, that can consistently deliver safe and high-quality services for the public. The proposed MLS, together with funding from the GM Clean Air Plan, will help deliver improved safety, customer focus, higher environmental standards and accessibility.
- 1.5 This collaborative approach seeks to establish a basic and common minimum in key areas, whilst allowing Districts to exceed these minimums where they consider this to be appropriate. As licensing is a local authority regulatory function, the Standards have been devised by the GM Licensing Managers Network, with the Chief Executive of Trafford MBC, Sara Todd helping to co-ordinate the work at the senior GM level.
- 1.6 MLS is also related to other key Greater Manchester priorities, most notably the GM Clean Air Plan and decarbonisation strategies (see Section 2), hence TfGM has been supporting the development of MLS ensuring it complements wider objectives.
- 1.7 Local reform through MLS can deliver real improvements across Greater Manchester, but the growth of out-of-area operation undermines local licensing, and gives cause for real concern that vehicles and drivers licensed outside our conurbation (but carrying Greater Manchester residents and visitors) may not be regulated to the high standards we expect. In this regard, it is important to recognise that Government reform of taxi and private hire legislation and regulation is urgently required. Further work to press the case to Ministers for reform is a key part of the overall approach.

2 CONSULTATION AND OUTCOME SUMMARY

- 2.1 An 8-week statutory public consultation (adhering to the government COVID-19 guidance and restrictions) on the proposed MLS took place from 8 October to 3 December 2020, alongside the GM Air Plan consultation. To ensure it was as accessible and meaningful as possible in the context of the physical restrictions; numerous channels were employed including online questionnaires, paper questionnaires, online focus groups, 40 in-depth interviews with stakeholder groups and a dedicated email address for general views where individuals struggled with other channels. The in-depth consultation also included a series of meetings with trade representatives in districts and GM level which have continued post consultation.
- 2.2 The consultation included questions designed to elicit a fuller and more informed understanding of the wider effects of COVID-19 on the economic health and sustainability of the taxi and private hire trades.
- 2.3 The consultation yielded a total of 1683 responses (in addition to the qualitative interviews and focus groups) during the consultation period which took place between 8 October and 3 December 2020 as follows:
- 1552 via online questionnaire
 - 84 paper questionnaires
 - 47 via email

Below is a high level summary of the responses in each category of proposed Standards, with the full consultation report being available to view at the [Greater Manchester Taxi and Private Hire Standards \(www.gmtaxistandards.com\)](http://www.gmtaxistandards.com) website.

2.4 Driver Standards

- Extremely high levels of agreement from members of the public (94%) citing expectations that their safety and experience would improve from the proposals
- Overall agreement with proposals from Trade (Hackney 58% and PH 57%) but substantial proportion did not agree (Hackney 28% and PH 29%)
- Drivers saw the benefit in improving the customer experience but expressed concern at cost implications and felt the dress code was unnecessary.

2.5 Vehicle Standards

- High level of agreement from members of the public (88%)
- Greater overall level of disagreement from Trade (Hackney 69% and PH 63%)
- Trade mostly commented on age policy proposals
- Concerns raised about the charging infrastructure for electric vehicles

- Public liked the proposal of CCTV but concerns raised by the Trade with regards to cost and data privacy
- Comments and some disagreement across trade and public with regards to colour policy proposals

2.6 Operator Standards

- Much broader agreement across both members of the public (94% agreed) and Trade (Hackney 67% and PH 65%)
- Main comments were in support of DBS checks for Operator staff, whilst some concern was also raised about cost and frequency
- Members of the public felt proposals could help improve customer service

2.7 Local Authority Standards

- High level of agreement again from members of the public (90%) and the Hackney Trade (72%) but Private Hire trade responses were split with only 51% agreeing
- Many Hackney and PH respondents commented that the licensing fee should be more affordable
- Members of the public were more in support of the licensing award than drivers, who did not feel it would be beneficial

3 INTERACTION WITH THE GM CLEAN AIR PLAN (GM CAP) AND FIVE-YEAR ENVIRONMENT PLAN

- 3.1 As noted elsewhere on the agenda, GM Authorities have been directed by government to introduce a Category C charging clean air zone (CAZ). This includes daily charges for buses, taxis and private hire vehicles (PHVs), LGVs, HGVs, coaches and minibuses that do not meet certain emissions standards. There are 4 categories of CAZ (categories A-D), and taxi and private hire vehicles are included in all categories.
- 3.2 With regards to the proposed final Clean Air Plan, following consultation the policy has been revised, which is to be agreed by the Greater Manchester local authorities. The detail can be found in the GM Clean Air Plan report.
- 3.3 The government have awarded the 10 GM Local Authorities £9.5m to support owners of non-compliant hackney carriages licensed in GM to upgrade their vehicles. The government have also awarded £10.2m to support owners of non-compliant PHVs licensed in GM to upgrade their vehicles. The funding will be used to provide grants and/or finance options to those upgrading their vehicle.
- 3.4 As well as this all Hackney Carriages and PHVs which are licensed to one of the ten Greater Manchester Authorities, as of the 3 December 2020 will be eligible for a temporary exemption until 31 May 2023. This is subject to the 10 GM local Authorities agreeing the proposed final plan.
- 3.5 The GM CAP will require taxi/PHV vehicles to meet stricter emissions standards than at present, which will mean a significant proportion of the trade will need to upgrade their vehicles to meet these emissions standards to avoid a charge. The CAP also has the potential for a significant pot of funding to support the trade in upgrading their vehicles.
- 3.6 There is also the ambition in the GM Five-Year Environment Plan for GM to be carbon neutral by 2038. This means sectors such as transport need to take very significant action now to reduce carbon emissions. For transport this means a rapid shift to vehicles that are not powered by fossil fuels. For taxis and PHVs to contribute to this would require them to switch to zero-emission capable (ZEC) vehicles.
- 3.7 To invest in ZEC vehicles, taxi and private hire proprietors require long term confidence in the local policy landscape, including future interventions and supporting infrastructure. GM consulted on the following proposed roadmap to ZEC licensed vehicles:
- From 2025 all new to licence vehicles would need to be ZEC; and
 - From 2028 all vehicles would need to be ZEC, meaning an entirely zero emission Taxi/PHV fleet across GM by 2029.

4 CONSIDERATIONS AND PROPOSED NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 There are several important factors for consideration in developing and agreeing the next steps for the MLS programme of activity, including views expressed through the public consultation, new government guidance, the implications of the GM CAP and the impacts of COVID-19.
- 4.2 One of the most significant outputs of the public consultation is the high degree of public support for the MLS proposals, with this most recent feedback echoing that of an earlier public conversation exercise held in 2018. However, this does need to be balanced by the real concerns expressed by many across the hackney and private hire trade in relation to the proposed vehicle standards and the timeline for implementation, especially in the context of the severe economic impacts that COVID-19 and the lockdown restrictions have imposed on the trade.
- 4.3 At each stage through the process districts have spoken and listened to trade concerns and feedback. This dialogue will continue.
- 4.4 Therefore further work is required to refine both the MLS vehicle proposals and implementation timeline (that was consulted on) in a way that both complements the GM CAP and the wider 5YEP, taking advantage of the funds available to support upgrade, and wider ambitions to ensure vehicles meet progressively higher environmental vehicle standards.
- 4.5 The Licensing Managers Network are continuing to work through the consultation responses alongside new government guidance and will be cognisant of Member feedback before agreeing a final set of recommendations for each standard. With the complexities and inter-dependencies of the vehicle standards outlined above, it has been proposed that the final MLS recommendations be reported in two stages; Stage 1 – Drivers, Operator and Local Authority Standards; and Stage 2 – Vehicle Standards.
- 4.6 Districts will be consulting on local transition plans for future policy with trade representatives having considered the current position the trade find themselves in. There is a need to set realistic lead in times, having considered the wider environmental context to the programme being delivered, to assist the trade in adapting to change and, for those who need to upgrade vehicles, plan their next steps.
- 4.7 Below is the current proposed outline programme of key project milestones. It should be noted that the programme currently assumes that the Clean Taxi Fund scheme will be opened from November 2021 onwards, with applicants needing to know by that stage what vehicle policy standards will be required:

Activity	Target Date
Update report to the Combined Authority	25 June 2021
MLS recommendations report (Stage 1) to Combined Authority seeking endorsement of final recommendations	30 July 2021
<p>MLS recommendations report (Stage 1) taken through District Governance</p> <p>MLS recommendations report (Stage 2) to Combined Authority – seeking endorsement of final recommendations</p>	<p>Sept – Oct 2021</p> <p>24 Sept 2021</p>
MLS recommendations report (Stage 2) taken through District Governance	Oct 2021 onwards

5 ADDITIONAL RESOURCE TO SUPPORT PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

- 5.1 As the above indicates, the remaining work programme is both complex and time critical. In recognition of this and the pressing and relentless day to day demands on Licensing Authorities during the COVID recovery, it has been recognised that additional resource is required to supplement the work of the Licensing Managers who will continue to play a central role. Given the in-depth understanding and specific licensing expertise required to provide the support required, a secondment from districts has been proposed alongside expert advice from the Institute of Licensing, and this additional support has now been secured and making progress on the work identified on the timeline above.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The 'golden thread' of licensing is that of public protection. We have seen from the consultation that the public are overwhelmingly in support of the additional safeguards and protection this project can deliver. As well as the local policy strengthening that minimum licensing standards will bring across Greater Manchester it delivers on the implementation of the statutory standards on safeguarding that the Government have introduced.
- 6.2 The vision of Greater Manchester is to continue to work closely together, influence policy change and support the licensed trade by delivering on its promise to provide financial support to move to greener vehicles. This is the start of a journey to continue to deliver excellence in licensing regulation in Greater Manchester. However, we cannot underestimate the challenges the trade continues to face and our continued support for them, and the public, in delivering safe journeys in safe licensed vehicles, driven by safe licensed drivers is essential. We will continue to work with the hackney and private hire trade to provide that ever important support and guidance whilst ensuring that public protection is at the forefront of our considerations.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The recommendations are set out at the front of the report.